

May 20, 2003

The Honorable Kevin Murray
Member, California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 4082
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SUPPORT FOR SENATE BILL 693

Dear Senator Murray:

The Little Hoover Commission supports your effort to address the need for an undersecretary of foster care within the Health and Human Services Agency. The concept of your measure would implement the Commission's recommendation in its August 1999 report, *Now In Our Hands: Caring for California's Abused and Neglected Children*, and its follow-up report in February 2003, *Still in Our Hands: A Review of Efforts to Reform Foster Care in California*.

In its most recent study, the Commission found that despite the reforms in the foster care system that have been attempted in recent years, the state still fails to meet the needs of the children in its care. The state has failed to put in place the leadership and management structure that would allow any of the incremental efforts to be implemented correctly, or to hold anyone accountable for their failure or success.

The system is still comprised of a number of state and local agencies, yet no one agency or individual is responsible for ensuring the best thing is being done on a child-by-child basis.

It concluded that since most of the programs serving abused children are in the Health and Human Services Agency, that agency should assume a leadership role. The Commission recommended creating within the Health and Human Services Agency an office of child services headed by an undersecretary of child services, responsible for preventing child abuse and caring for abused children.

While the responsibilities of the Health and Human Services secretary are broader than programs for children, an undersecretary reporting directly to the secretary could provide the child-focused leadership and management that are needed. The undersecretary could ensure programs are coordinated, reforms are effectively implemented, and a strong partnership is developed between the state and county agencies responsible for helping abused children.

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SB 693 addresses the Commission's recommendation by establishing within the Health and Human Services Agency the position of undersecretary of foster care coordination. The measure directs the undersecretary to coordinate the activities of state and local agencies that provide for the needs of children placed in foster care. For these reasons, the Commission is taking a support position on the bill.

As the bill moves through the committee process, I will be writing letters on behalf of the Commission to legislators urging aye votes. If you feel my presence and testimony at a hearing would be helpful, please let our office know, and I will make every attempt to be available.

If you have any questions or if I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

James P. Mayer
Executive Director

c: All Commissioners